

Williams-Tucker House
(Samuel May Williams House)
3601 Avenue P
Galveston
Galveston County
Texas

HABS No. TX-297

HABS
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24-GALV,
42-

PHOTOGRAPHS

HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

REDUCED COPIES OF MEASURED DRAWINGS

Historic American Buildings Survey
Heritage Conservation and Recreation Service
Department of the Interior
Washington, D.C. 20243

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HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY HABS NO. Tx-297
WILLIAMS-TUCKER HOUSE (Samuel May Williams House)

Location: 3601 Avenue P, Galveston, Galveston County, Texas.

Present Owner: Galveston Historical Foundation.

Present Use: Historic House Museum.

Significance: This building is one of the few structures of the first years of Galveston that stands today. It is important because of its age, but more so because of its owner, Samuel May Williams. He was an important figure in the colonial period of Texas, serving as Stephen F. Austin's secretary in colonial affairs.

Most important, however, Williams and his partner, Thomas F. McKinney, with great personal sacrifice, secured money on their personal loan for the government of the Republic of Texas and thereby insured the success of that government which at the time was without funds and unable to secure loans. Williams was also Texas' first banker, opening the Commerical and Agricultural Bank in 1847, and a leading pioneer businessman.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Date of erection: 1839-1842. The history of the building of Williams' house with this present research is at odds with the long-held accepted local opinion. That story essentially states that Williams imported a house frame from Maine in 1838 and erected his house at that time. Another version states that Williams assumed the house in payment of debt from another Galvestonian. No documentation has been found, however, to substantiate these stories. In fact, documentary evidence strongly suggests that Williams had the house built.

In June of 1838 Williams and his wife, Sarah, and children were still in residence at Quintana on the Brazos River. At that time Williams left on a trip east to arrange the needed loan for the Texas Republic. McKinney was engaged at that time in

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consolidating the firm's business and transferring its activities to the newly plotted town of Galveston. Sarah Williams chose to take up residence with her mother on Buffalo Bayou rather than live with the McKinney family in Galveston.

Williams' house was begun in the autumn of 1839 and it seems that McKinney attended to its construction. In a letter dated December 10, 1839 to Williams he related "I have not been able to get your foundation finished yet for your house but will in a few days as the cold weather is over and those miserable workmen will now work a little."

It appears that the building was completed late in 1841 or early in 1842 as Williams addressed a letter to his wife on March 9, 1842, as "at Home": "Get Mr. Givens to come up and pick out refuse lumber in the yard for the cowpen." This is no doubt in reference to the usual lumber scraps that remain following the completion of a building.

2. Architect: None known
3. Original and subsequent owners: Williams died in 1855 or 1856 and the property was sold to Phillip C. Tucker, prominent Galveston attorney.
4. Alterations and additions: Although three years under construction, the house did not prove serviceable, as it was poorly finished out. Extensive repairs and replacements were carried out by Williams in 1844. Again in a letter to his wife dated May 19, 1844 he related "Williams [his son] amuses himself making windmills and as the carpenters are now at work shingling the house, he does not lack for materials." On May 31, 1844: "Three sides of our roof are finished and but for Fry's death and rain it would all have been shingled it will be done tomorrow." On June 10, 1844: "We have our house reshingled and the carpenters are at work now at the Cupulo. I have had the old floor taken up and a new one is now being laid, and I hope and trust we shall hereafter have a tight house."

Other floors were apparently poorly laid for on June 19, 1844, he wrote: "The carpenters are now occupied in relaying the front gallery floor and the floor in our room so that I am provisionally occupying the room Henry had."

Finally on July 8, 1844 he wrote: "we are all at sixes and sevens. The house has a new roof on it and a new Cupulo floor and everything about it has been so altered that I do not think it will leak anymore indeed from the rains that we have had we find it as tight as a bottle. We are now engaged in plastering, and I hope when we are through that you will be pleased..."

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The house was apparently satisfactory, but five years later it required painting. A bill dated November 10, 1849 from Joseph W. Rice included:

To Painting House	\$145
To Painting inside back gallery and blind doors	8.00
To Painting outside Brick kitchen	3.25
To painting south parlour	3.25
To graining four side doors	5.00
To painting saves and hearths	2.86
To priming rear steps	1.83
To painting stairs two coats and ballusters in second story one coat	1.50
	<u>\$170.69</u>

Also in November of 1849 Williams again was working on the porch. Twenty one days of labor was paid as well as two newel posts for \$2.00.

It appears that the property was fenced in 1852. A bill of May 13, 1852 shows:

1436 ft. Mobile pine @ \$20	\$ 29.36
1520 (pcs) Cypress pickets @ 3¢	45.60

And a bill of May 18, 1852: 517 ft. of Pailling

Other extensive work must have been done at this time in addition to building the fence, however. On July 20 Williams purchased 1018 feet of pine weatherboard and received a bill of September 16 for work on the house including painting the south side of the main house for a total cost of \$496.00. Such a sum implies considerable alterations or additions.

In 1855 other work was done as indicated by Williams' own memo:

October 6, 1855 for painting house	\$ 71.10
September 23, 1855 for carpenter work and lumber	30.00
October 23, 1855 for tin work, paints and oils	41.65
plastering	7.00

A bill dated August 1855 from Frank Brown was for brick work done at the residence for \$60.00

B. Historical Events and Persons Connected with the Structure:

As has recently been pointed out by Ruth G. Nichols, Samuel May Williams " has received less attention by historians and biographers than many a lesser Texas hero." Williams was born at Providence, Rhode Island on October 4, 1795, the eldest of eight children.

Following experience in his uncle's counting house in Baltimore, Williams in 1815 or 1816 moved to New Orleans. There he was a bookkeeper in the commission house of Morgan, Dorsey and Company. In March 1822 Williams joined Stephen F. Austin's colony and came to Texas. During those first years while Austin attempted to receive confirmation of authority from the new and unstable Mexican Government, Williams served as interpreter for various persons and assisted them in their business.

In the autumn of 1824 at Austin's request, Williams became the official secretary of the colony and the head of the Public Land Office at San Felipe de Austin. He served in this capacity for eleven years in which time he was responsible for surveying and locating lands under the granted titles and carefully recording these for the records of the colony and the Mexican Government.

Williams was also a postmaster at Austin under the Mexican Government and for some years as secretary of the ajuntamiento of San Felipe de Austin from 1828 to 1832.

In 1833 Williams and Thomas F. McKinney entered into a mercantile partnership that was to become of great importance to the state. They at first traded in cotton and plantation goods on the Brazos with offices at Brazoria and the firm was soon well established with strong credit connections in New Orleans and the east. During the struggle for independence in 1836 McKinney and Williams advanced as much as \$99,000 to the destitute government of Sam Houston. This was money secured on personal notes of both McKinney and Williams and at great sacrifice and hardship. They were never fully repaid. Without this help it is doubtful if the government could have survived, particularly as much of the funds went for the support of the Texas army in the field against Santa Anna.

Following the Texas Revolution in 1836, President Sam Houston appointed Williams and A.T. Burnley to negotiate a loan for the new Republic not to exceed \$5,000,000. Shortly thereafter, Lamar became president and replaced most of Houston's appointments including Williams. He remained naval agent for the Republic, however, and was successful in purchasing one ship, two brigs and three schooners for the new Texas navy.

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While Williams was in the east in 1838 negotiating for the Republic, his partner, McKinney, had consolidated their business and moved from Quintana to the new city of Galveston. He erected a large warehouse and wharf, at that time the first such structures in Galveston.

Beginning in 1839 the business increased and became one of the great commission-merchant firms of the Republic. In the early part of that year the first English vessel to enter the port was consigned to McKinney and Williams. A return cargo of cotton was shipped out, establishing the prosperous direct trade with England.

Williams was granted a bank charter in 1835 by the Mexican state of Coahuila y Texas, but was never able to secure the capital for it. During the course of business in the Republic the firm of McKinney and Williams assumed many banking functions as a necessity in the light of the then absence of a Texas bank. Finally in 1847 Williams opened his Commercial and Agricultural Bank which later had several branches in Texas and the east.

D. Bibliography:

1. Primary and unpublished sources:

Galveston, Texas. Rosenberg Library. Samuel May Williams Collection, Manuscript papers.

2. Secondary and published sources:

Frantz, Joe B. "The Mercantile House of McKinney and Williams, Underwriters of The Texas Revolution", Bulletin of the Business Historical Society, March 1952.

Nichols, Ruth G. "Samuel May Williams", Southwestern Historical Quarterly, Vol. LVI, No. 2, October, 1952.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.
Director
Galveston Architecture Inventory
March 16, 1967

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The structure is a one story frame building of Classical Revival style with a hipped roof and dormer windows for the attic quarters. An ell extension on the north side connects with the old brick kitchen. The whole structure is raised several feet on brick piers. A gallery extends across the south and east (front) elevations.

2. Condition of fabric: Good.

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Over-all dimensions: The dwelling measures 50' x 56' and is one-and-a-half story high on a raised foundation.
2. Foundations: The building rests on brick piers, rectangular in section except at the corners. These piers extend well into the ground as the house was raised some six to eight feet above the original ground level for protection from storm tides that occasionally inundated the island. Subsequent grade raisings in the early part of this century have raised the ground level to within three feet of the sills.
3. Structural system: This is a heavy timber framed house as may be seen by examining the structure underneath the house. Previous histories of the building relate that the frame was shipped from Maine and erected here. Present documentation has failed to substantiate this assumption.
4. Wall construction: Timber braced frame with weatherboard siding.
5. Porches: A front gallery extends across the east side and turns the corner at one end to extend along the south side until it meets an enclosed porch room at the southwest corner. The porch is supported by brick piers and across the east front is divided into six bays by classical Tuscan wood columns.

The original porch did not make the return at the southeast corner and was divided into five bays. The sixth bay and return on the south side were later additions.

The columns are correct Tuscan (Roman Doric) in style with a well designed entasis and complete with correct capitals and bases. The columns themselves are of wood and were made in two sections. A typical balustrade connects the columns with the exception of the central intercolumniation left open for the entrance steps. The two newel posts for the steps are apparently reused but the balustrade was constructed in recent years.

A rear gallery across the middle part of the west facade was enclosed by adjustable louvered blinds at an early date.

6. Chimneys: There are two brick chimneys for the house and one for the brick kitchen.

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7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: The entrance door is a six panel wood door of solid construction. The doorway is characteristic of the Greek Revival style with glass transom and side lights.
 - b. Windows: The original windows are six-over-six light double-hung wood sash. Those opening into the front gallery are floor length casements with transoms above.
8. Roof: The roof is hipped with a flat deck on the top which formerly was the cupola floor. A single dormer window on the east and west slopes and double-dormer windows on the north and south slopes, all with gable roofs, provide illumination and ventilation for the attic space. The original roof was shingled but asphalt roofing has been applied in recent years.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plan: The house has a typical Greek Revival plan with central hall and four flanking rooms. A stairway in the hall leads to the attic quarters which corresponds in plan to the ground floor. The old one-room brick kitchen at the rear was originally separate from the house. It was later connected with a hall enclosure.
2. Stairway: An open stair is located on the south wall of the central hall and leads to a split landing. At that point, the principal stair turns back upon itself along the north wall. Several steps lead directly off the landing at a central point toward the back of the upper story. These steps originally carried up to the cupola.

A delicate turned balustrade is provided for the stairway and landings.
3. Floors: Floors are yellow pine.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: The front two rooms and central hall are plastered. The large room across the back of the house is finished with beaded ceiling indicating that certain changes have occurred. The attic spaces are finished with painted center-match boards.
5. Doors: Doors are four panel, wood.
6. Trim: Wood trim is found around all openings.

7. Hardware: Very little of the original hardware has survived. The shutter hardware on the gallery is significant, for the original hand wrought iron strap hinges are intact. Rim locks and butt hinges are found on interior doors.

8. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating: Two chimneys originally served the house, being located at the juncture between the two adjoining rooms on each side of the central hall. There were then, two fireplaces back to back. The upstairs had no heating facilities.

D. Site:

1. Orientation and general setting: The house faces east and is parallel to Avenue P.
2. Enclosure: The house is partly surrounded by a modern picket fence.
3. Outbuildings: The original brick kitchen now adjoins the rear of the house on the northwest corner.

Prepared by: John C. Garner, Jr.

Director

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PART III. PROJECT INFORMATION

The Galveston Survey was jointly sponsored by the National Park Service, Office of Archeology and Historic Preservation and the Galveston Historical Foundation, Inc., and developed under the direction of James C. Massey, Chief of the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS). This structure was measured and drawn during the summer of 1967 under the direction of Professor Melvin M. Rotsch, project supervisor (Texas A&M), John C. Garner, Jr., architect (University of Texas), by student architects Michael D. Casey (University of Houston), Larry D. Johnston (Kansas State University), James E. Murphy (Texas A&M) and Gerald R. Rapp (Texas A&M). The historical data was written by John C. Garner, Jr., acting as the Director of the Galveston Architecture Inventory. The written data was edited for transmittal to the Library of Congress in the summer of 1980 by Kent R. Newell of the HABS staff. The photographs were taken by Allen Stross in the summer of 1967.